

# Should Women Be Allowed in Combat?

Women are still officially barred from combat in the U.S. military, but in Afghanistan and Iraq, they're fighting—and dying—alongside the men

**YES** American women are engaging in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan, and as a result, some are returning home with wounds both obvious and hidden. The issue is not whether women should be allowed in combat; it's that our attitudes and laws need to catch up to the reality on the battlefield.

In the U.S. Army (as in the other military services), women are barred from holding a combat-arms position, including the infantry. In addition, female soldiers are prohibited from serving in ground-combat units.

Despite that prohibition, I was attached to an infantry battalion for my 12-month tour in Iraq. There were not enough male soldiers in my Civil Affairs detachment for all the infantry battalions we had to support. Out of sheer necessity, the official policy was ignored. I went everywhere the infantry soldiers did, lived as they did, and faced the same dangers they did.

Many female soldiers have been in, or still are in, the same situation: They go out on missions and face the possibility of roadside bombs, small-arms fire, and more. In today's military conflicts, there are no front lines, and the dangers are everywhere.

Should women be allowed to hold a combat-arms role, and not just provide support? Yes, absolutely. Some argue that women are not physically or emotionally capable of being infantry or field artillery soldiers, but women in a dozen countries, including Israel and Canada, are already proving themselves in such roles.

The bottom line is that in the U.S., women are still perceived as less capable than men, and the law of our land enforces that outdated attitude. •

—CATHERINE ROSS

Former Civil Affairs Sergeant, U.S. Army Reserves

**NO** The nation's pride in our military women does not justify assignments in direct ground combat, which involves more than the experience of being in danger, or even the risk of ambush.

Forget about video-game action heroes like Lara Croft, and think about real-life infantry, Marines, and Special Operations Forces that engage the enemy in the most remote and dangerous parts of Afghanistan. These men carry electronic equipment, weapons, ammunition, heavy body armor, and water weighing 50 to 100 pounds. Such burdens would weigh more heavily on smaller female soldiers who have, on average, 45 to 50 percent less upper-body strength and 25 to 30 percent less aerobic capacity, which is essential for endurance.

In the Army's own surveys, 90 percent of enlisted women have said they oppose involuntary combat assignments on the same basis as men. They know that training for female soldiers is modified to compensate for physical

differences between men and women, but there can be no modifications on the battlefield. In direct combat, women would not have an equal opportunity to survive, or to help fellow soldiers survive.

Even if physical capabilities were objectively measured and equal, co-ed combat assignments would affect discipline and unit cohesion. Women lose more duty time due to medical issues, including pregnancy, and their absence would be particularly disruptive in combat units, where concentration and mutual trust are essential for survival.

At times, we have no choice about sending young men to war, but we do have a choice when it comes to sending young women. Changing that would be a mistake. •

—ELAINE DONNELLY

President, Center for Military Readiness





# Can Electric Cars Make a Go of It?

Gas is topping \$3 a gallon just as the Chevy Volt and the Nissan Leaf start hitting the market

**YES** While the internal combustion engine is far from dead, electric cars are here to stay.

The chief benefit of electric cars is that they use energy more efficiently than even the most efficient fossil-fuel-powered vehicles. That means they're much less expensive for drivers to operate. Chevrolet estimates it will cost most drivers about \$1.50 a day for the electricity to charge the Volt to get to and from work—a lot less than most people now spend on gas for their commutes.

That efficiency also has enormous benefits for the environment. About 17 percent of greenhouse-gas emissions that are causing global warming come from vehicles that burn fossil fuels like gasoline or diesel. Replacing them with electric cars, which emit no greenhouse gases, would reduce that number. It would also cut air pollution and begin to curb America's dependence on finite oil supplies, much of which comes from foreign countries hostile to the U.S.

Some electric cars can travel only 75 to 100 miles between charges, which is a legitimate concern. Yet even today's limited ranges—which are sure to improve as battery technology advances—still allow electric cars to be used effectively in 90 percent of daily driving situations. In addition, almost 60 percent of American families have more than one car, so a limited-range commuter vehicle that can be charged at home or at work could make sense for many families.

The really encouraging thing about the electric car is that these are still its early days. The internal-combustion engine has had 125 years to become the much-improved but still imperfect device it is today; we've just started to focus on investing in the technology of electric engines. For electric cars, the game has just begun. •

—JAMIE KITMAN

Columnist, *Automobile Magazine*

**NO** Electric cars, which are powered by rechargeable batteries, may be the wave of the future, but for the next decade they'll remain niche products that cannot broadly succeed in the U.S. car marketplace.

First, electric cars remain limited in range, since their batteries need recharging every 100 miles or so. This will likely be the case for the foreseeable future. For most people, that makes them practical only for a daily commute, supplemented by a second car. Most Americans won't want to buy a car that's impractical for longer trips.

Second, they're expensive. Electric driving does offer efficiency gains like regenerative braking, in which using the brakes recharges the battery. But at current gas prices, the additional efficiency doesn't offset the higher sticker prices. The plug-in hybrid Chevy Volt sells for more than \$40,000, and the all-electric Nissan Leaf sells for almost \$33,000—both out of range for most middle-class families. For now that means the electric car will remain limited to drivers for whom it's a lifestyle statement.

Third, electric cars offer at best small reductions in

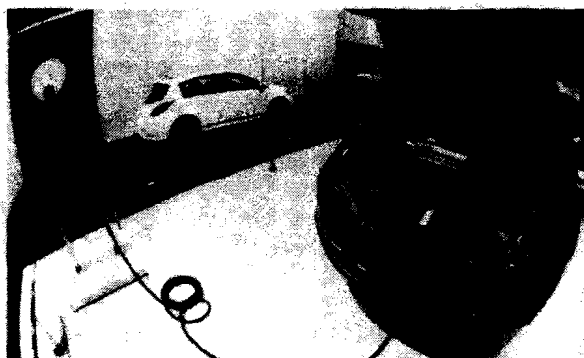
overall carbon emissions, since the electricity they're using is largely generated by coal-burning power plants. And we will have to deal with recycling all those toxic car batteries.

A better solution is diesel, which much of Europe already relies on. Diesel cars are much more efficient than gas-powered cars, and overall more efficient than electric cars. What's more, mass-production capacity is already in place.

In 10 years, we may start transitioning toward electric cars, but it will be 20 years before they have a chance of becoming the standard. For now, we should do all we can to encourage the use of diesel, today's best technology. •

—MICHAEL SMITKA

Professor of Economics, Washington and Lee University



The 2011 Nissan Leaf, plugged in for charging



## Should students do the grading?

The Supreme Court says the practice doesn't violate a student's right to privacy, but is it right for students to grade each other?

**YES** The Supreme Court was absolutely correct to say it's OK for students to grade each other's homework, quizzes, and tests. In fact, it's a great idea.

By grading each other's papers and seeing the problems their peers encounter, as well as their own, students double their exposure to the troubles that they may meet on future exams and tests. The basic purpose of school is to learn not just what others have done right, but to learn from what they have done wrong. How better to teach this than to put it directly into the lives of students?

Besides, teachers are underappreciated and underpaid for the number of hours they have to work to be able to really teach well. Grading all their students' papers can take hours on end. Some of that time and energy can be saved by spending a few minutes in class, while providing an invaluable learning experience.

I understand that some are sensitive to their classmates seeing their work or grades. But school is a place where every mistake can be learned from, and self-esteem can be built. Any good teacher would make allowances for students who don't want their classmates to grade their assignments.

Grading each other's papers may be one of the best ways for students to reinforce within themselves the ways to respond to the most difficult parts of what they are learning. It simply can't be denied that in-class grading of assignments is a great way to learn, and those with personal issues can resolve those issues if they just present their problems to their teachers. Allowing students to learn in the best way they are able should be the responsibility of society. If learning in school upsets some students and their parents, perhaps they don't really realize what they are upset about.

—KEVIN GREEN, 17  
Fort Myers, Fla.

**NO** A girl cringes as her classmate announces her failing test grade and hands her the paper, bathed in the red ink of the student grader. A boy across the room tries to ignore the taunts of "idiot" coming from the brainy kid next to him. And the composure of the classroom gradually deteriorates.

With the increase in student grading over the past few years, scenes like this have become a bitter reality in schools across the nation. Teachers are not only instructing their students to grade each other's papers, but also to announce the final grades to the class, subjecting them to the harsh judgment of their peers. Teachers and schools should not advocate student grading and public announcement of grades because it provides a traumatizing breach of privacy for students and families and it subjects students to harsh judgments and treatment by their peers.

Since 1974, a law known as the Buckley Amendment has prohibited the release of education records maintained by schools in order to preserve the privacy of students and their families. I strongly disagree with the Court's ruling that this law does not pertain to student grading.

I can think of no greater breach of privacy than the exposure of one's personal information to a group of peers. It is the teen equivalent of publicly disclosing annual household income among families of varied economic status. This can be very embarrassing and cause unfair judgment by one's colleagues. Releasing this sort of personal information should be avoided, especially by institutions that seek to provide a supportive environment conducive to mutual learning during essential years of human development.

—NICK BROWN, 16  
Berwyn, Pa.



Kevin Green



In *Owasso v. Falvo*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in February that student grading doesn't violate privacy. Krisja and Jim Falvo (pictured) had challenged the practice on behalf of their children.



Nick Brown



# Should teens be tried as adults?

Most states have made it easier to try teens as adults, but is it fair to hold them to adult standards?

**YES** The criminal justice system should give teenagers who commit heinous crimes the same punishments it bestows upon older offenders. Only then can justice truly be served and society protected from dangerous individuals.

At a time when teenagers are more predisposed to violence than in the past, there is a pressing need to counteract this trend. Trying juveniles as adults sends a clear message that crimes such as murder, rape, and assault will not be tolerated and that perpetrators must accept the consequences of their actions. The significantly harsher penalties for being tried as an adult serve as a deterrent to potential juvenile offenders.

Holding teenagers responsible for themselves is not unique to our justice system. Jewish youth are declared adults in the eyes of their religion when they turn 13. Similarly, many Christian teenagers reaffirm their faith with confirmation vows in the early teen years. These ancient religions recognize that significant moral decisions can be made by teenagers, and so should our criminal justice system.

The argument that teenagers cannot comprehend the gravity of their crimes is an insult to the intelligence of young people. Teens have the maturity and judgment to make reasoned decisions. That's why many young people get driver's licenses before they turn 18. The same thinking skills that allow us to operate vehicles can also formulate criminal intent and differentiate right from wrong.

With more violent crime by teenagers well aware of their actions, it's clear that we should recognize juvenile offenders of violent crimes for what they are: dangerous criminals who happen to be teenagers.

—JULIA KAY, 17  
North Potomac, Md.

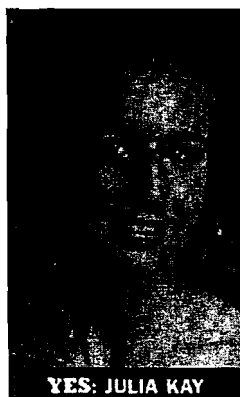
**NO** Teens should not be tried as adults, because the laws aren't applied fairly, the results are horrible, and teenagers simply are not adults.

Trying teens who commit serious crimes as adults just makes matters worse. Many were physically, emotionally, and sexually abused. Some got involved in crime through their families and never had positive role models. Prosecutors more often charge youth of color as adults. And because most are from low-income families, they get public defenders, increasing their chances of getting convictions and harsh sentences.

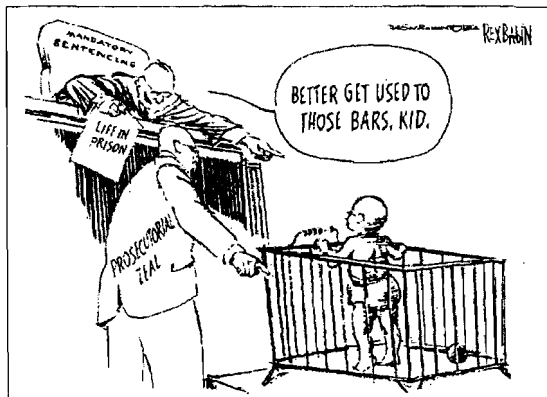
In adult jails and prisons, teens have to grow up fast just to survive. They learn more about crime and get traumatized even more. Many get raped and abused, or commit suicide. As for rehabilitation, the few programs available in adult prisons are not designed for young people. When they get out, they'll have adult criminal records that aren't erased when they turn 18, as in the juvenile system. They can hardly get an education, let alone a decent job. Sometimes crime becomes the only life they know.

People need to realize that teenagers are not adults. Many youths don't consider the consequences of their actions. Teens act out of emotions and don't make long-range plans. Because we are different, society makes rules to "protect" us—from cars, credit cards, nightclubs, cigarettes, and alcohol. It's ridiculous to also make laws that do the exact opposite, treating us like adults when we need help the most. Teens who get caught up in serious crimes need rehabilitation. Treating them like adults practically guarantees they'll get worse.

—ROCIO NIEVES, 18  
Oakland, Calif.



YES: JULIA KAY



NO: ROCIO NIEVES

CARTOON: KEYTHRIN JOHNSON, THE SACRAMENTO BEE/NORTH AMERICA SYNDICATE





This police practice has long seemed unfair, but is it necessary—maybe even essential—in times of crisis?

In many airports, security guards question people who match the description of terrorists before letting them board planes—not because they are racist, but to keep travelers and innocent people on the ground safe. Truthfully, if people who fit the description of a terrorist

—ABIGAIL EDEN, 16  
Omaha, Neb.

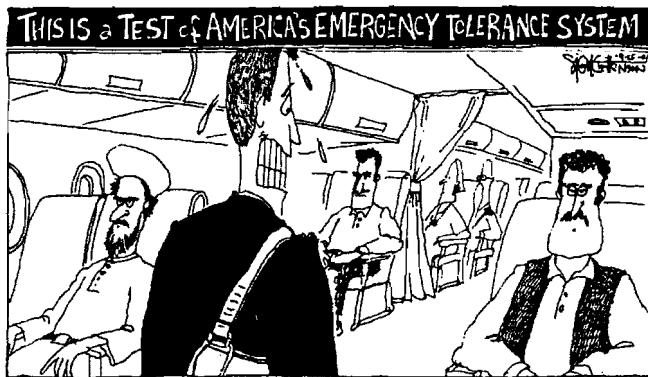
Arab-Americans now face overwhelming suspicion that they are somehow responsible for the atrocities of September 11, in which thousands died, including Arab-Americans.

My fellow Americans must understand that Arab-Americans are with them in this time of

—IYAD FATTOM, 17  
Bethesda, Md.



Though racial profiling has been criticized, U.S. courts have never declared it legally dead. With law-enforcement focusing on Arabs in the hunt for terrorists, some individuals may be singled out for questioning more than ever.





# Make baseball chaw-free

*Other voices, Minneapolis Star Tribune*

Published: 11:43 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 23, 2011

Besides the World Series duel between the St. Louis Cardinals and Texas Rangers, another significant battle is occurring in Major League Baseball over the use of smokeless tobacco by players.

Commissioner Bud Selig wants to stomp the chomp. He's supported by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Cancer Society, the American Medical Association, the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids and others.

Banning smokeless tobacco from pro baseball makes good sense for health reasons. Players are role models, and tobacco addiction is a nasty and sometimes deadly habit.

Studies show that smokeless tobacco is every bit as hard or harder to give up as cigarettes. Health risks include addiction, tooth and gum disease, and various cancers (oral, esophageal, pancreatic) that can be painful, disfiguring and deadly.

Some players who dip or chew argue that a ban would infringe on individual rights. That viewpoint ignores the impact that player behavior has on young people. It also ignores the change in attitude about tobacco in American society.

The Centers for Disease Control reports that a startling 15 percent of high school boys use smokeless tobacco. Those students are more likely to be adult cigarette smokers.

With the World Series as a backdrop, several U.S. senators appealed to the players' union by letter to get behind the cause.

"Unfortunately, as these young fans root for their favorite team and players, they also will watch their on-field heroes use smokeless tobacco products," the senators wrote.

Think the tobacco isn't noticed by fans? Last month, Milwaukee Brewer Nyjer Morgan, a brash and hot-tempered center fielder, tossed his chaw at an opponent, igniting a bench-clearing tussle.

Swaying minds in baseball on this issue is hard, because the marriage between the sport and tobacco is a long one. USA Today reports that Bull Durham tobacco, first produced in 1860, played a role in the term "bullpen."

"Players chewed tobacco to generate saliva on dusty infields," the newspaper reported.

"When gloves came into vogue, they'd spit into the mitts to keep the leather soft. Saliva, generated by chewing tobacco, was the lubricant of choice for the sharp breaking pitch known as the spitball, banned in 1920."

We know too much now about the ills of tobacco to let the chomping continue. Several former players who were struck by disease because of chewing are bravely supporting the call for a ban.

While a ban won't stop on-field melees, it's a terrific idea that the players' union should support.

After all, baseball should be a game remembered for hitters rather than spitters.


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# Opposing view: School lunch standards miss the mark

By Kraig R. Naasz

Updated 6d 20h ago

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Frozen food makers are proud of our partnership with school nutritionists. Together, we serve nearly 43 million federally subsidized meals every school day to children across America. We also support efforts to combat childhood obesity and improve childhood nutrition, such as the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act.

**OUR VIEW:** Congress stands up for pizza and fries

This law requires that school meal standards reflect the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. In keeping with the dietary guidelines, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's proposed new standards call on schools to double fruit and vegetable servings. We enthusiastically endorse that recommendation.

By Toby Talbot, AP

Other aspects of USDA's proposed standards miss the mark and would saddle cash-strapped schools with \$6.8 billion in new costs.

USDA wants to restrict servings of "starchy vegetables" — corn, peas, potatoes and lima beans — to just one cup per week. This proposal contradicts the dietary guidelines, which encourage Americans to eat white potatoes and other vegetables high in potassium and fiber.

USDA also wants to change the nutrient classification of tomato paste, which is used to make pasta and pizza sauces. Here again, the dietary guidelines encourage consumption of tomato paste because it is rich in potassium, fiber and vitamins A and C. Since it takes six whole tomatoes to make two tablespoons of tomato paste, an eighth of a cup of tomato paste is given the same credit as a half-cup of other fruits and vegetables.

Thousands of school nutritionists urged USDA to revise its proposed standards, and many also petitioned Congress. The bipartisan action taken by Congress to correct the starchy vegetable and tomato paste provisions will improve childhood nutrition by allowing schools to serve a wide variety of healthy foods that kids enjoy eating.

For millions of children, school breakfast and lunches


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offer the only calorie-controlled and nutritious meals they will eat in a day. Thanks to the efforts of frozen food makers and school nutritionists, we can chart a balanced approach for reducing childhood obesity and improving nutrition that does not burden school districts, and the families they serve, with massive new costs.

*Kraig R. Naasz is president and CEO of the American Frozen Food Institute.*

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dkisok  
11:03 PM on November 28, 2011

Score: 30

That was bout the most plastic, bleached, white, empty of nutrition piece of worthless blabber I have read on here in a while.

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johnCHASwebbJr  
12:47 AM on November 29, 2011

Score: -16

The article , in my opinion , states a valid point-of-view, and is worth trying for a year .

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2 replies



duck dodgers  
5:13 AM on November 29, 2011

Score: 22

Best solution? Put the video game down and walk your fat @\$s around the block a few times.

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OBJECT-IVE  
5:15 AM on November 29, 2011

Score: 20

If your priorities are not in the best interests of the students you serve, you are not doing your job.

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STOP the exploitation.

1 reply

John Brain

Score: 21



5:20 AM on November 29, 2011

duck dodgers

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5:13 AM on November 29, 2011

Best solution? Put the video game down and walk your fat @\$s around the block a few times.

\*\*\*\*\*

You really nailed the problem, duck! Kids are having little or no physical activity. Parents are using cable and video games to babysit their kids. Are parents so afraid of the boogeyman that they are denying their kids the time to go and play outside?



Pathfinder49

8:38 AM on November 29, 2011

Score: 8

Most school food is preprocessed unhealthy food anyway so what is the difference if the kids only eat pizza and greasy fries for lunch. Anything else served by schools is just as unhealthy. And the preprocessed food takes less help to prepare and the cheap preprocessed food fits a school's budget...isn't that what it is really all about.

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AND if school did serve healthy food, kids today would just throw it all away and complain and their parents would demand that pizza and greasy fries be put back on the menu.

1 reply



indyfan2

9:12 AM on November 29, 2011

Score: 4

Instead of making snarky comments about the article why not volunteer at a school to help kids develop good habits. Why not get involved in the process and talk to your school board.

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Directive 10-289

9:51 AM on November 29, 2011

Score: 1

Kinda weird, but it seems like both views are basically from the leftist perspective--that it's the government's job to fix childhood obesity, not the parents'. My kids are thin because of ME, not because of government school (they're homeschooled anyway).

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The simple fact is, the MORE you're dependent on the government for anything the worse off you are...in America our goal should be to create responsible citizens who contribute to society rather than a permanent underclass used by politicians to extract money from tax payers...and this all in the name of helping them, YET THEY NEVER GET HELPED!!!! They're always poor...and it's to the government's advantage that they be so...meanwhile the suppliers grow richer and richer...at least with oil companies we have no one to blame but ourselves, these people are stealing tax dollars...



Minuend

10:29 AM on November 29, 2011

Score: 5

Well, good to hear non-partisan, self-interest comments.

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hacksaw7


10:57 AM on November 29, 2011

Score: 8

Stop trying to hide behind this bs reasoning and own up to the fact that we all know already ... you fought to have these changes made on behalf of your own pocketbook. You fought and you won. Congats for your success. The fact is you managed to prove that it wouldn't be a much worse choice

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nutritionally for our students (though it is worse) and got the government to agree that the lack of nutritional value was not worth more than the potential expense of reorganizing your business strategy to align with the new plan.

 3 replies

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# Editorial: School lunch guidelines lose to cooks in Congress

Updated 6d 20h ago

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When Mom told you to eat your vegetables, she wasn't thinking about pizza and french fries. She probably meant broccoli, carrots and that old standby, spinach.

## OPPOSING VIEW: USDA standards miss the mark

But Mom clearly had more common sense than members of Congress, and their friends in the frozen food industry, who this month beat back efforts to make school lunches more nutritious. The story is a particularly unappetizing microcosm of how Washington works.

The tale begins 20 years ago, when putting 2 tablespoons of tomato paste on a slice of pizza allowed the slice to count as a vegetable in the federally funded school lunch program. (Forget, for a moment, the technicality that tomatoes are a fruit.) This year, the U.S. Department of Agriculture moved to change that little absurdity and other outdated guidelines in response to a congressional directive to improve school lunches.

But when the USDA came out with a set of sensible proposals this summer, there was a huge push-back from food producers with financial stakes in maintaining the status quo in the lunchroom, where pizza and fries are, respectively, the most commonly consumed entree and vegetable.

The American Frozen Food Institute and Minnesota-based Schwan Food Co., a major seller of frozen pizza, lobbied against a change in the way tomato paste would be counted. The National Potato Council and state potato lobbies, meanwhile, fought new guidelines to limit servings of potatoes and other starchy vegetables to twice a week.

Never mind that a third of the nation's children are overweight or obese. Or that everybody from nutritionists to first lady Michelle Obama have been trying to persuade Americans to eat less fattening, healthier meals. Or that the USDA looked to the venerable Institute of Medicine for guidance on its proposals. Or that school lunches, financed by taxpayers to the tune of \$13 billion a year, are often the main meal of the day for the nation's poorest

By Joe Raedle, Getty Images

School lunch : The USDA wasn't trying to ban either fries or pizza from meals served nationally to kids.

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kids.

No, Congress chose to listen to industries whose profits and employment levels would be dented by the new guidelines. (And who also happened to spend nearly \$500,000 lobbying this year.) Faster than you can toss a frozen pizza into a microwave, lawmakers undid key parts of the proposals.

Sens. Susan Collins, R-Maine, and Mark Udall, D-Colo., both from potato-growing states, sponsored the successful measure to block the limit on potatoes. Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., challenged the tomato-paste proposals, along with most of Minnesota's representatives. Rep. John Kline, R-Minn., who has gotten \$10,500 in campaign contributions from Schwan's political action committee (PAC) since 2000, wanted to scrap the new nutritional guidelines entirely, arguing that they cost too much. At least Congress kept parts of the program.

Mind you, the USDA wasn't trying to ban pizza or potatoes. There's nothing wrong with those foods in moderation. It simply wanted to make room for more vegetables and to ensure that a slice of pizza alone couldn't constitute an entire school meal, as it now can. The proposals would have merely required schools to serve pizza *with* a vegetable, not as one, as nutrition advocate Margo Wootan observed.

It's hardly breaking news that Congress is in the pocket of powerful lobbies for guns, banks and seniors. But you'd hope that when it came to healthier meals for hungry kids, lawmakers would do the right thing. Of course, low-income children don't vote or have PACs.

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whatelse  
7:38 PM on November 28, 2011

Score: -32

Feed your own kids!

Don't have money?

Don't make the kids in the first place.

We are humans not rabbits.

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4 replies



Zon

7:41 PM on November 28, 2011

Score: 44

In case people are wondering what Occupy Wall Street is all about...

While it would undoubtedly be a long and varied list, I'm thinking this would be on it. And likely near the top.

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2 replies



Chagasman

8:35 PM on November 28, 2011

Score: 12

Who is responsible for the wave of obesity in our population? Its is the corporations! They make millions more on salty, high fat, high carb foods than they do on healthy food, so they push it on the population through everything from advertising to food stands and fast food resturants everywhere. Every big box retailer now seems to have a hot dog/nachos/pretezels stand and they all seem to cater to lines of fat, wheezing people. Everyone seems to have to have a soft drink in their hands at all times.

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The government has a duty to encourage people to eat right and eat less. The societal cost is too much.

7 replies



spikefc3s

9:11 PM on November 28, 2011

Score: -23

Seriously? Who cares. If you are fat you did it to your self. All of you lazy over eaters keep trying to put blame everywhere else when in reality it is only your fault. Stop eating crap, get off the couch and exercise. The country is broke and we don't need to be spending money force feeding people organic everything. If your kid is fat, you are a bad parent.

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3 replies



dkisok

10:52 PM on November 28, 2011

Score: 39

Sellout to big business that produces this white bread, non nutritious garbage. Also, stop trying to paint this as bipartisan. Republicans demanded this be passed in the last budget standoff.

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AHapka

11:52 PM on November 28, 2011

Score: 27

Honestly, if you served the veggies with the pizza all you would end up with is fatter garbage cans in the cafeteria.

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Seriously...

2 replies

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## On death penalty, confidence does not replace truth

By Leonard Pitts Jr.  
[lpitts@MiamiHerald.com](mailto:lpitts@MiamiHerald.com)

2000: Frank Lee Smith is posthumously exonerated — he'd died 11 months earlier — 14 years after being convicted of raping and murdering an eight-year-old girl. The eyewitnesses were wrong.

2001: Charles Fain is exonerated and set free 18 years after being sentenced to death for the kidnapping, rape and murder of a young girl. The scientific testimony was wrong.

2002: Ray Krone is exonerated and set free 10 years after being sentenced to death for the kidnapping, rape and murder of a bar worker. The scientific testimony was wrong.

2003: John Thompson is exonerated and set free 18 years after being sentenced to death for murder. The prosecutors hid exculpatory scientific evidence and the eyewitnesses were wrong.

2004: Ryan Matthews is exonerated and set free five years after being sentenced to death for killing a convenience store owner. The eyewitnesses were wrong.

2008: Kennedy Brewer is exonerated and set free seven years after being sentenced to death for killing his girlfriend's three-year-old daughter. The scientific testimony was wrong.

2010: Anthony Graves is exonerated and set free 18 years after being sentenced to death for the murder of an entire family. The sole eyewitness —who was himself the murderer — lied.

I could make a much longer list.

There are literally hundreds, of men and even a few women who have been exonerated and set free after being sentenced to death, life, 25, 60, even 400 years for awful things they did not do. I could make a longer list, but space is at a premium and there is more that needs saying here.

They killed Troy Davis Wednesday night.

He went to his death still proclaiming his innocence of the 1989 murder of a Savannah, Ga., police officer. Davis was convicted on "evidence" that boiled down to the testimony of nine eyewitnesses, seven of whom later recanted.

But Spencer Lawton, who originally prosecuted the case, would not want you to worry your head about that. Hours before Davis was put to death, Lawton was quoted by CNN as saying he had no doubts about the case and was confident Davis was the killer. How much do you want to bet the prosecutors of Fain, Brewer, Krone or any of those hundreds of others would have said the same thing, expressed the same confidence? Without that confidence, the whole house of cards comes tumbling down.



Meaning the death penalty, a flimsy edifice erected on the shaky premise that we always get it right, that human systems always work as designed, that witnesses make no mistakes, that science is never fallible, that cops never lie, that lawyers are never incompetent.

You have to believe that. You have to make yourself believe it. Otherwise, how do you sleep at night?

So of course a prosecutor speaks confidence. What else is he going to speak? Truth? Truth is too big, too dangerous, too damning. Truth asks a simple question: In what field of endeavor have we always gotten it right? And you know the answer to that.

So truth is too pregnant for speaking. Better to avert your eyes and profess your confidence.

But one day, too late for Troy Davis, too late for too many, truth will out. Godspeed that day the cards come tumbling down.

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# We don't need to excuse student loan borrowers for poor choices

*Esther J. Cepeda*

Published: 10:49 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 29, 2011

Fundamentally, American society doesn't value a college education as the necessary prerequisite to gaining knowledge or becoming a responsible citizen. Instead, it is promoted as the guaranteed means to gainful employment.

In fact, the value of a college education is dropping so much that certain graduates who are dissatisfied that their diplomas did not yield the job placements of their choice want to shirk their responsibility to pay back their student loans. I'm referring to the portion of the Occupy Wall Street demonstrators and their supporters who have made "free college education" and "immediate across-the-board debt forgiveness for all" a rallying cry.

They haven't gotten their way, but certainly won an enthusiastic nod from President Barack Obama. He was at the University of Colorado, Denver, on Wednesday sprinkling tasty but unsubstantive campaign trail breadcrumbs. It was similar to his limited mortgage refinancing plan, which will assist very few homeowners but sounds good in stump speeches.

Obama told the college students that they deserve a break because he, too, thought paying back those pesky student loans was a bummer. "We want you in school," the president said, "But we shouldn't saddle you with debt when you're starting off."

I hear you Mr. President. My family has more outstanding student loans than the value of our house. But there's not a lot in his bundle of breaks that is new or different, or that will have much impact on the millions of borrowers currently in repayment or already defaulting on student loan debt. The College Board estimates that debt will exceed \$1 trillion — more than credit card debt — for the first time this year.

The "Pay As You Earn" plan Obama is implementing through executive order is a tweak of an already existing plan that caps monthly student loan payments to 15 percent of a borrower's discretionary income and forgives the remainder of the debt after 25 years. But not many people have exercised the option. The change, starting in 2012 — two years earlier than outlined in a recently passed law — will be available only to new borrowers, offering a 10 percent cap with forgiveness after 20 years.

The administration also announced that certain eligible borrowers will be able to consolidate their disparate loans and reduce their interest rates — an option that's been available both through private lenders and through Sallie Mae, the country's largest student loan servicer, for years — by a whopping one-half of a percentage point.

Lastly, Obama pushed what he called a simple fact sheet titled "Know Before You Owe" so students will "have all the information you need to make your own decisions about how to pay for college."

This implies that students are in trouble because they don't understand what they're getting into when they take out student loans. How can that be?

Back in 1992, when I accepted the first of my many student loans, my signature was required on a separate form that, in very plain English, said, "Yes, I understand that I am responsible for paying back these loans plus their interest in full." Since 1965, colleges and other student lenders have been required to make borrowers sit through either in-person, video or interactive webinar entrance and exit loan counseling designed to drive home the point that loans must be repaid, and can't be cleared through bankruptcy.

There is little excuse for students not knowing that repayment was expected and even less excuse for default.



During those same counseling sessions, students are instructed about the six-month grace period, their right to postpone, reduce or suspend repayment for various economic hardships or military service, or extend their payment plans.

It's true that tuition is ballooning — though, to be fair, the amount of federal assistance in the form of both loans and grants is keeping pace pretty well — and well-paying jobs are not plentiful. But attempting to ease student-loan burdens is not the answer. There should be a focus on skyrocketing college costs, and the responsibility of students to choose more affordable schools or earn degrees in fields that have ample job openings.

Reinforcing the notion that you shouldn't have to repay money no one forced you to borrow is certainly not the way to lay the foundations for a healthy long-term economy. But then again, preaching the basics of personal responsibility and sound financial planning to students, recent grads and Occupy Wall Street supporters sure wouldn't go over well on the campaign trail.

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